

Reflection Paper

Subject: Language Arts

Grade: Kindergarten

Module 4: Assessment for Active Learning : Teacher implements instruction in order to engage students in rigorous and relevant learning and to promote their curiosity about the world at large by:

Selected Indicator: Using and/or designing a variety of formative assessments and summative assessments and criteria that directly align with the learning objectives and value the diversity of ways in which students learn. See additional notes at the end of the document.

Goal:

I will learn how to create and use formative assessments to inform my literacy planning and instruction. As a result, students will receive more targeted instruction, engagement will increase, and student scores on the summative assessments will improve.

Initial Summary:

After reflecting on my current practices for assessing student learning during literacy instruction, I have noticed that I generally relied on summative assessments to measure student performance. After teaching a unit or right before report cards, I would give a series of summative assessments to measure student learning during the unit and to track student progress towards Kindergarten standards. I used these assessments to create and differentiate instruction for small groups. However, I did not often give ongoing, formative assessments to track student progress and continuously inform my instruction throughout a unit. While I was generally noting student strengths and needs, I was not formally tracking them. As a result, I was not providing timely, differentiated, data-driven instruction to meet my students' needs.

Reflection:

I began my new learning by looking at the CCT Performance Profile and speaking with my mentor teacher about my current practices in literacy assessment. I had a general understanding of the use of formative and summative assessments, but I wanted to learn more about the variety of assessment measures that I could be using to understand the individual needs of my students and to continuously inform and differentiate my instruction. During my guided reading instruction, I was using initial assessment data to form small groups and to target instruction. At certain points of the year, such as at the end of a unit, I would use a battery of assessments to monitor and report student progress. However, I felt that I could be assessing student progress more often, and using the information gained from these assessments to plan for more targeted instruction on a daily basis.

I decided to speak with my Literacy Coach to gain some insight into how to implement effective formative assessments during the first half of Kindergarten. She pointed me toward many resources that deepened my understanding of assessment tools in the early grades. We also had a discussion of the meaning of formative assessment and its effective use, which shifted my viewpoint. I learned that formative assessment is any assessment that is used to guide instruction and results in a change in your teaching practice. I realized that I had been using some formative assessments, but that I needed to find a way to incorporate them into my practice more often. We worked together to look at my students' initial assessment data and to think about their instructional areas of need.

I also left my conversation with her with many new resources. She gave me the book Transformative Assessment, by W. James Popham. Through this resource, I learned that my teaching should always be based on evidence of students' current level of mastery. The best available information about what to teach next almost always comes from a determination of what students currently know and can do. I realized that I wasn't always teaching with the most current information about my students in mind. Therefore, my grouping of students was not as flexible as it could be. Popham suggests creating learning progressions to guide instruction, which are maps of sub-skills needed to get to an eventual curricular goal.

After reading this text, I decided to create learning progressions for the skills I would be teaching during guided reading. At the beginning of the year I gave several assessments to each of my students, including a Phonological Awareness assessment, a Letter Identification assessment, a Dolch Sight Word Assessment, and a DRA. Based on these assessments, I identified strengths and areas of need for each student, and grouped students based on their common needs. I then used the kindergarten curriculum and my new learning from Popham's book to begin to create learning progressions for each group. I decided to focus on phonological awareness and letter identification in my lowest group, letter and sound identification in my second lowest group, and letter-sound correspondence and sight words with my two highest groups. The goal for each of the groups was to increase foundational reading skills to meet the kindergarten Reading Foundational Skills standards.

With this narrowed focus in mind, I was then able to easily differentiate instruction and identify formative assessments I could use to monitor each student's progress. For example, I formed a group of four students who struggled with phonological awareness. I looked closely at their scores on the subtests of the initial assessment to see which specific skills I should focus my instruction on. I decided to target blending syllables, segmenting syllables and isolating the initial sound in a word to start. The students had low scores in these areas, and I knew that instruction would increase the students' readiness to segment and blend sounds at the word level, and to eventually read words. I started each guided reading lesson with a "listening game" that targeted these phonological awareness skills. I consulted a resource given to me by my literacy coach, Road to the Code, which is a series of systematically taught phonics and phonemic awareness lessons. This resource provided me with new ways to practice the targeted skills. I monitored progress by observing one student a day during the "listening games" to check for understanding.

As a result of this focused assessment and differentiated instruction, I saw an increase in these students' phonological awareness skills, as evidenced by an increase in their overall scores on the phonological awareness assessment, as well as a significant increase in correct responses for the targeted sub-skills. On the pre-assessment for Phonological Awareness, the students in this group scored an average total score of 6.33 out of 35. After receiving targeted instruction, this group scored an average of 16.68 out of 35 on the same assessment. Furthermore, these students demonstrated mastery in the sub-skill areas that I targeted for instruction, including Blending Syllables, Segmenting Syllables, and Initial Phoneme

Isolation. On the Blending Syllables subtest, the initial average score of the group was 35% correct, while the score on the post-assessment was 93.3% correct. On the Segmenting Syllables subtest, the group's initial average score was 45% correct, while the average score on the post-assessment was 90% correct. On the initial Phoneme Isolation subtest, the group's average initial score was 5% correct, with all but one student scoring a 0%. After targeted and differentiated instruction, the group's average score rose to 87.7% on the post-assessment.

As I was continuing to add to my new learning over the course of this module, I recognized the need for different ways for my students to demonstrate their learning. I consulted my Literacy Coach and my mentor teacher, who both pointed me towards Marie Clay's Observation Survey, a test of literacy skills in the early grades. This resource opened my eyes to a new way of assessing children, through observation. Clay says that observation tasks show teachers how children work at learning in the classroom, and allow them to see the process of learning rather than just a product. She suggests that controlled observation is a more effective way to assess a child than observation while teaching, casual observation, or fleeting observations in a group. The type of observation she suggests is more systematic and objective, and gives the teacher insight into how a child approaches a learning task.

As a result of this new learning, I realized that I had been using the more ineffective observations Clay mentioned to guide my instructional practices. I decided to administer two of the assessments she designed, Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words and Letter Identification. These formative assessments gave me tremendous amounts of insight into my how my students approached a learning task, and I was able to use the results to drive my instruction. The Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words assessment allowed me to see how students were applying their phonics knowledge to a dictated sentence-writing task. As I observed my students completing the task, I could see some students saying the word slowly and trying to hear the sounds, while others simply wrote random letters. Some students even used the number "2" in place of the word "to". I used the information from this assessment to design writing tasks within my guided reading lessons for two of my four reading groups, my middle two groups. I gave each student a journal, and, after the students read a new book at their independent level, I would dictate a sentence related to the story. Students have the opportunity to write the sentence with a colored marker and to draw a matching picture, which increased engagement. I provided support in stretching out words to hear sounds and matching each sound with a letter. I also used these lessons to monitor student progress.

The use of this assessment and my resulting differentiated instruction had a great impact on my students. My students request to write during guided reading every time we meet, and often remind me when it is a writing day. On the initial Hearing and Recording Sounds in Words assessment, one of my groups heard and recorded an average of 3.67 out of 37 sounds in a sentence. On the latest assessment, this group heard and recorded an average of 20 out of 37 sounds. The other group initially heard and recorded an average of 22.25 out of 37 sounds. After eight weeks of targeted instruction, this group heard and recorded an average of 30 out of 37 sounds.

I also administered Clay's Letter Identification assessment, which gave me insight into students letter and sound knowledge. This assessment was different than the Letter Identification assessment I had given at the beginning of the year, in that it allowed students to name the letter, or say the sound of the letter, or give a word to represent a letter. This allowed me to see how students thought about letters, and to individualize my instruction based on the exact letters and letter sounds that students needed to learn in their preferred learning style. I created letter bags for each

student that contained all of their known letter sounds, and we added new letters as we learned their sounds. I also used these letter bags as a formative assessment, as I would have each student read me all of their letters weekly.

This shift in practice resulted in an increase of students letter and sound knowledge. At the start of the module period, one of the groups knew an average of 34.75 letters and 4.5 letter sounds. At the end of the module period, the same group knew an average of 50.25 letters and 17.5 letter sounds.

Next, I read the book When Readers Struggle, by Fountas and Pinnell, in order to increase my use of effective instructional strategies during guided reading based on my students strengths and areas of need identified through assessments. Through this resource, I learned that it is essential for students to talk to each other about their reading and respond to text. I also learned how to use a running record to inform instruction. Furthermore, the authors often returned to the important role of motivation and emotion in reading habits. They stated that teachers should share assessment results with students, and celebrate successes with them.

As a result of this new learning, I was able to transform my practice during guided reading instruction. I created a predictable lesson format that included opportunities to talk about and respond to text. Within that format, I was able to insert opportunities to practice the skills targeted as a result of formative assessments and opportunities for progress monitoring. In the past, I had used running records mostly as an indicator of a student's reading level. I learned how to look at a running record more critically and notice each student's strengths and areas of need. For example, I noticed that one student was often adding words into the sentences he was reading. He would say "little brother" instead of "brother" and "teddy bear" instead of "bear." I worked with this student on crisply pointing under each word and using the first letter and the picture to solve an unknown word.

Additionally, I decided to use assessments to increase student motivation. Previously, I would not often share student results on assessments for fear of decreasing their motivation or that they were too young to understand. After reading this resource, however, I decided to share and celebrate student successes. This definitely made a difference in my students' motivation to learn. For example, after administering a letter identification assessment, I shared the results with my students. Several of my struggling learners were so proud of themselves and their growth. I overheard the students celebrating with their peers, saying things like "I knew all my letters! I'm going to tell Mommy!" and "I knew 43 letters today! I'm going to keep learning until I know all of them!" One student even jumped up and cheered for himself after he knew 5 letter sounds. It was wonderful to see these students celebrating themselves, and to see the other students celebrating along with them.

I took my new learning about the important role of motivation a step further by implementing a new sight word program. Based on the learning progressions I had created earlier, I knew that sight word knowledge is important for students who are reading emergent-level texts. I also knew, based on my pre-assessment data from the Dolch Sight Word assessment, that many of my students required sight word instruction. The program I implemented broke down the kindergarten sight words into colored lists of ten words at a time, starting with the most common words first. This allowed me to easily differentiate my sight word instruction for each student. After students mastered a list, they would receive a certificate and move on to the next list. The use of the lists served as an ongoing assessment opportunity for me, and allowed me to track each student's growth

and progress. It also motivated students by providing an opportunity to celebrate their success. I created sight word rings for each student, which included known words and words on the list they were working on. Students could work on their rings during down time in the classroom, which provided differentiated practice.

The use of this sight word program and my instruction around sight words had a great impact on my students. On the initial assessment, my class knew an average of 7 sight words. After eight weeks of implementing this program, my class knew an average of 22 sight words. I looked at my data from my class last year to get a comparison for how this program was working. I did not implement the sight word program last year. During the same time last year, the average increase in word knowledge per student was 7.2 new words learned from September to January, while this year the average new words learned per student in the same time period was 14 more words from September to January. I know that it was a different group of students, but the average increase in words known during the same time period doubled. This leads me to believe that the differentiated instruction that each student received following sight word assessments was a major contributor to student success in their learning.

Overall, I have made a shift in my practice towards using a variety of assessments to inform and adjust my instruction and to differentiate for individual student needs. Where before I used mostly summative assessments, I now use formative assessments much more often in my classroom. Not only does this maximize our learning time in the classroom, it has also caused an increase in student achievement, as evidenced by post-assessment data, and an increase in student motivation and engagement, as evidenced by post-assessment data and student conversation in the classroom. By learning about new ways of assessing students, including observational assessments, I was able to give my students the ability to demonstrate their learning and experience success in different ways. The use of on-going and formative assessments has also allowed me to reflect on my own practice more often, which I believe is the key to effective instruction.